



THE

SEASON OF SCARCITY.

LONDON: PRINTED BY S. ROUSSEAU, WOOD STREET,
SPA FIELDS; AND SOLD BY T. WILLIAMS, NO. 10,
STATIONERS' COURT, LUDGATE STREET.

IT becomes us with equal wonder and gratitude often to reflect upon the kind provision, which God has made for the family of Man; and our feelings on this subject should be the more cordial and animated, inasmuch as He has spoken of this family 'for a great while to come,' saying—'while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest shall not cease.'

But this general promise no more binds the faithful Author of it to make the seasons, year after year, alike favourable, than his assurance, that the world shall not be turned again into one vast ocean, binds him to prevent the ravages of a *partial* flood. Many a husbandman still sows with trembling, and reaps with a heavy heart; 'the evil arrows of famine' finite here—a province, and there—a nation; nor is it probable that mortals ever saw the day, on which plenty diffused a *universal* triumph: yet how deep the anxiety created among a people by *one* unfavourable season!

Think of a country not visited indeed with the full horrors of a *famine*, but where the fields have greatly disappointed hope, where food is procured only at an unusual price, where there exist all the symptoms of prevailing scarcity; you are moved with compassion: let the case be brought nearer home: suppose that country to be Britain, you would be filled with sadness;

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with zeal and union you would apply all the varieties of relief. Some ardent friend of his country, much affected by its calamitous situation, might, in addition to other means, step forward, and thus bespeak attention——

‘ My afflicted countrymen !

In the name of the wise and good among you, I venture to solicit a candid hearing ; and, while it shall be my object to report *their* sentiments, I wish to feel that they are practically *mine*. Were the wise and good to address you under the present circumstances, would it not be in language to this effect ?

LET US ACKNOWLEDGE THE HAND OF GOD ; thus he teaches us our intire dependence. Did not the sower go forth to sow ? was not the seed committed with the usual care to the bosom of the ground ? were there not reapers to cut down the produce ? Yes ; and the same diligence, the same skill, the same earnest desire have been exercised, as in former seasons ; but He, who ‘ commandeth the sun, and maketh a decree for the rain,’ darkened the sky with heavy clouds ;

————— ‘ from the hills innumerable streams

Tumultuous roar’d, and high above its banks

The river lifted ; with the rushing tide

Herds, flocks, and harvests, cottages, and swains,

Roll’d mingled down.’—————

THOMSON.

Nor should it excite our wonder, that these events break in upon a lengthened course of prosperity, and occur where the amplest provision seemed to have been made against them. Consider the famines mentioned in the Bible ; they were confined to Egypt, and to Canaan : to Egypt—considered then, like Britain, France, and Poland, in the present age, as the granary of Europe ; to Canaan—a land chosen for the seed of Abraham on account of its fertility, ‘ a good land, a land of brooks and fountains, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig-trees and honey.’

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Without a blessing from above, how vain the richest soil, and the most arduous culture!

LET US BOW SUBMISSIVELY TO THE DIVINE APPOINTMENTS. The boldest sinner dares not literally 'to set his mouth against the heavens,' and with an audible voice to charge cruelty upon the Creator; but that impatience, which questions his goodness, destroys a man's peace, and loads his conversation with unamiable complaints,—is widely prevalent, and variously expressed. May it not mingle an unsuspected influence with our investigations of the causes, that produce scarcity? Should we not carefully guard against it, when fixing censure, yielding to fear, or contriving methods of redress? While thus employed, let us say from our hearts unto God, 'these are thy judgments, and they are righteous; thou turnest a fruitful land into barrenness for the wickedness of them that dwell therein.'

In this view, O Britons, how gentle the divine correction! Reflect on your iniquities: Who can calculate the profane oaths, which are uttered within your borders, in the short space of a single day? who would not be shocked, were he to see all the dishonest, intemperate, and impure, assembled into one crowd? Religious ordinances are despised by some, neglected by others, and unprofitably regarded by tens of thousands. Ambition, with extravagance for her companion, pervades the higher and middling classes with growing influence, nor is she a stranger to the abodes of poverty. How astonishing that we suffer, as yet, so little! What must it be to witness the devastations of 'the locust, the caterpillar, and the canker-worm?' to know, that while 'the garners are laid desolate, the seed,' which should replenish them, 'is rotten under the clods;' to covet as our food the flesh of a human being—a brother, a wife, a child? Yet all this came upon Israel. O Britain, who among thine elders recollects, who among thy historians ever recorded a scarcity to be compared with *this*?

LET US HEAR THE VOICE, WHICH CALLS US TO PENITENCE AND PRAYER. Say not, 'He punisheth the innocent with the guilty; for *all* are guilty, and the holiest of men will be the first to say—'we deserve to have our supply, not merely reduced, but utterly withdrawn. Yea, were it possible to divide the guilt of the best human character among the individuals of a whole nation, that nation, we conceive, might justly be blotted out for ever. Turn therefore, O countrymen, with supplication to a chastizing God, implore him to 'deal not with you after your sins, nor to reward you according to your iniquities;' but for the sake of that sacrifice, which was offered upon Calvary by the great Redeemer, to forgive, and at the same time, 'to cleanse you from all unrighteousness.' Lift up your hands, ye devout; prayer availeth much. Moses prayed; and God spake kindly again to a people, of whom he had said—'Let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them.' Elijah prayed; and famine was succeeded by abundance. Ye ministers, pour out your hearts in the *sanctuary*; bow reverently before God, ye parents and masters, amidst your respective *families*; and let mortals of every age and rank plead for themselves, their relatives, and their country in the depth of sacred *retirement*.

LET US NOW LEARN THE INESTIMABLE VALUE OF THE SCRIPTURES.

When God designed to awaken the most tremendous alarm, he threatened, 'not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but a famine of his holy word.'

O Britain! There are many kingdoms more populous and extensive, many, whose air is clearer, where the seasons are more regular, and the soil more productive; but there is no kingdom so replenished with spiritual advantages. 'The word of the Lord' is in all thy villages; to thousands of thy poor its treasures are opened in their early days, and plans for the extension of this glorious privilege are continually multiplying.

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In a few years, it is hoped, there will be found scarcely an individual, even in the lowest class, but what will have a Bible, and be able to read it. There are many too, whose delight as well as office it is, to 'speak on God's behalf;' and their theme is mercy: they describe provisions fit for the *soul* to live on; they publish through the land the cheering information that Jesus Christ is 'the bread of life.' 'Come, ye hungry and thirsty,' they cry aloud; 'come without money, come without fear, come without delay; there is room for millions; the source of supply, and the bounty, which throws it open, are alike inexhaustible.'

LET US NEGLECT NO LAWFULL MEANS OF LIGHTENING THE GENERAL PRESSURE. Every one has a share of influence; let him exert it all.

To some are committed *ten* talents; happy you, who, having the indulgence, feel your obligation to assist *largely*! And happy you, who, though not ennobled, not independent on trade, not inhabiting superb abodes, have yet a heart to say, with grateful satisfaction—'We are rich, for we have enough, we have something to spare!' Happy they, through all the gradations of wealth, who have learned that an ability to serve the temporal and eternal interests of men, is the highest distinction, which wealth confers!

Oh what debtors are you, whom God surrounds with this ability! you are not only maintained, but indulged; supplies flow in more rapidly than your wants; to *you* Winter comes stripped of half its melancholy, and Scarcity itself can inflict none but the soft sorrows of sympathy. Be the representatives of him, who 'giveth you all things so richly to enjoy;' take the poor under your protection, invite by your humanity the blessing of him who is 'ready to perish.'

But on this head we may well forbear exhortation; the numbers of your class, who are daily offering their assistance, make it more necessary that we congratulate and applaud. You have come forward in
great

great bodies; and, not satisfied with the bare subscription of your names, you act in unison, and make your benevolence tell to its full extent, by being benevolent *on a plan*. You have seen, that during a scarcity, it is expedient to encourage a reduced consumption of the article most affected; you have sought for wholesome substitutes; nor is it too much to affirm of *some* of you, that you abridge yourselves, and are not unwilling to partake of the food, which on such reasonable terms your establishments distribute among the poor. Go on—but beware of placing your exertions in the Saviour's stead, or of entertaining the hope that they will atone for any sinful indulgence. Establish and exalt them by all the principles of evangelical religion.

We want your assistance too, ye *poor* of the land, we can do you no good without it. You are a numerous class, and the proper conduct of each member would produce the most happy consequences.

We lament the inconveniencies and hardships, which you suffer, and it affords us pleasure, when we behold you noticed and relieved. At this season in particular, with all your industry, we know that it is with much difficulty, you obtain a support. But as poverty in itself is no disgrace, neither is it a proof of divine vengeance. Lazarus, whom angels bore into Abraham's bosom, was *poor*; the twelve apostles were *poor*; Jesus himself, the glorious Son of God, for the sake of sinners, became *poor*; God, as the father of the *poor*, commends them to the rich, saying—he that giveth to the *poor* lendeth to the Lord.

The charge has been accepted, the loan cheerfully made. For, we live in the age of liberality, and a kind of parental feeling inspires the wealthy Public. Rest assured, ye children of poverty, your anxieties are made a common cause; the ingenious *contrive* on your behalf, the ministers of religion *plead*, and all seem ready to contribute.

Be of good cheer,' the same wise Providence, which lays on the burden, is thus enabling you to bear it; and if you are not wanting to yourselves, we indulge an unshaken confidence, that you will be still upheld, and at length revisited with the smile of plenty.

Meet the wishes of each generous friend by a patient continuance in labour, sobriety, and carefulness. In the cheapest times, *you* need all the advantages, their closest union can impart. A negligent and wasteful habit is *then*, and much more *now*, not only an enormous crime, but unaccountable infatuation: it chains you in the prison of perpetual want. He, who had just fed thousands by a miracle, commanded his disciples to 'gather up the fragments, that nothing might be lost.'

Imagine then the guilt and folly of that man, who takes the earnings of the day, and meanly spends them upon himself. Behold him among brother-profligates drowning his reason, and degrading himself below the level of a brute; see how he staggers home; hear the infernal language, with which, having passed the threshold of his door, he overwhelms the cries of infancy, and the bitter lamentations of the unhappy mother; cries and lamentations often to be renewed! Is it for such a man to murmur? Can *he* hope for assistance? Were it possible to forget his family, it must be only in a *late* stage of suffering that Charity herself would notice his appeal. The monster, who thus impoverishes those, whom the nearest ties of human nature bind him to support and cherish, deserves the reprobation of the good, and will assuredly, if he repent not, experience the eternal vengeance of Heaven.

We retire from a character so base and from scenes so wretched, hoping that our description, attended with divine influence, will soften and reclaim some, while

while it establishes and bears onward those, who are already travelling in a better path.

Respected Contrymen,

Whether you move in high stations, or tread the vale of obscurity and indigence, we entreat your regards to every thing amiable and holy, to whatever conciliates, unites, strengthens, and relieves; and especially to that 'pure and undefiled religion,' which by providing immortality and glory for the soul, leaves us so little to fear from the failure of these earthly harvests.

And thou, Father of Mercies, wilt return with thine accustomed bounty; 'thy paths shall drop fatness upon the pastures, the little hills shall rejoice on every side, the pastures shall be clothed with flocks, the valleys covered over with corn, they shall shout for joy, they shall also sing;' or should thy 'hand be stretched out still,' and thicker darkness spread over the sky; thou hast a people, who know thy name, who delight in thy testimonies, and whose cheerful confidence has often said—'Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet we will rejoice in the Lord, we will joy in the God of our salvation.'

LONDON:

Printed by S. ROUSSEAU, Wood Street, Spa Fields, for the RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY; and sold by T. WILLIAMS, at their DEPOSITORY, Stationers' Court, Ludgate Street: Where Communications (Post Paid) will be received; and Orders (for ready Money) executed to any Part of the Kingdom.

Sold also by all Booksellers, Newsmen, and Hawkers. 1800.

[Price ONE HALFPENNY, or 3s. per 100.]

